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School districts in Santa Cruz County brace for cuts

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By [Megha Satyanarayana](#)

Posted: 03/14/2010 01:30:56 AM PST

SANTA CRUZ -- County schools have had a hard year, and next year will likely be no better.

Facing some \$50 million in projected lost funds for 2010-2011, each of the 10 K-12 districts and the county Office of Education has made tentative plans to tighten belts that they say have run out of room for extra notches.

Monday is the deadline to give preliminary pink slips to certificated employees, who are usually teachers, counselors and the like. Meanwhile, state legislators and the governor wrangle through the budget process, leaving schools in limbo on what funding they will actually get, but forcing them to plan years out.

"It's reading tea leaves," said Santa Cruz City Schools Trustee Cynthia Hawthorne. The district approved preliminary layoffs of what equals 29 full-time teachers and other employees.

The Sentinel asked each of the county's 10 districts and the county Office of Education to share preliminary plans to stay afloat next year. These plans will change over the next three months. For some, there will be little difference from last year. For others, there will be possible parcel tax or bond measures, fewer teachers, shorter school years and administrative cuts. Their snapshots are below.

When the dust settles on the state budget process, education officials hope to rescind pink slips. But it's unclear what will happen. California did not make the first cut for federal funds for Race to the Top, but some schools, including those

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in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District, might qualify for federal dollars to overhaul themselves. The governor is so far banking on billions of federal dollars to help balance a \$20 billion gap, but educators statewide are pessimistic those dollars will come through, and don't know whether that would mean further cuts for schools.

To complicate matters, cuts often extend to janitors and maintenance staff, who have no deadline for layoffs, but must be notified several weeks in advance that layoffs are coming. Most districts have temporary employees they may not rehire.

The state budget uncertainty is a yearly process that in years of prosperity was perhaps less stressful. But the recession has made more noticeable the dance between a balanced state budget, balanced school

district budgets and laid-off teachers. After statewide events on March 4 to protest education cuts, petitions are now circulating that would change the legislative majority needed to pass a budget and new taxes from two-thirds to a simple majority.

On Wednesday, Santa Cruz City Schools board members approved a resolution asking the state to live up to its constitutional mandate to properly fund education, even if it means raising taxes. There is talk among school officials of suing the state to fund education.

Trouble has been brewing for local schools for years. Some districts were less affected last year because of one-time rescue funds. Others, such as the Mountain Elementary School District in Soquel, made drastic moves to stay open. The district had to cut \$150,000 for the 2009-2010 school year, and to do so, reduced the number of students it served. That in turn changed how the district is funded.

"In the long run, we made a tough call last year to make a smaller footprint," said Superintendent Ken Miller, who said his district's worries are not over since it depends on property taxes.

"Two to three years out, if property taxes don't increase, we'll have to do layoffs, we'll have to do furloughs," he said.

Here is the picture for other school districts in the county.

Pajaro Valley Unified School District

The South County school district is the largest, serving about 19,000 students in Watsonville, Aptos and surrounding areas with 1,200 teachers.

■ Projected budget 2010-2011: \$164.5 million. About one-third of tax-based funding is state-funded and about 18 percent of grants are state-funded.

■ Budget 2009-2010: \$183.5 million. The district received some one-time federal funds that did not carry over to 2010-2011.

■ Possible cuts: The equivalent of 180 full-time K-12 employees, including eight assistant principals, 12 middle and high school counselors, two groundskeepers and four custodians. Savings: \$8.5 million.

■ Other cost-saving measures: Assistant superintendents will take 10 furlough days, saving \$18,000, and other administrators will take furlough days to be determined.

Santa Cruz City Schools

Santa Cruz schools are split into two districts, one for elementary schools and one for middle and high schools. Both have different sources of funding, but are administered as one.

■ Projected budget 2010-2011: \$60 million, of which 77 percent is state-funded.

■ Budget 2009-2010: \$65.4 million.

■ Possible cuts: The equivalent of 52 full-time employees, including 12 elementary school teachers and three math teachers, and most of the adult education staff.

■ Other cost-saving measures: Administrators will take nine furlough days, for a savings of about \$200,000.

Scotts Valley Unified School District

Scotts Valley school leaders are debating whether to put forth a bond measure or a parcel tax measure in an upcoming election.

■ Projected budget 2010-2011: \$16.6 million, about 32 percent of which is state-funded, depending on property taxes.

■ Budget 2009-2010: \$18.3 million.

■ Possible cuts: The equivalent of 3.3 full-time employees, met by reducing hours for several employees, including high school teachers.

■ Other cost-saving measures: none.

San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District

■ Projected budget 2010-2011: \$20 million.

■ Budget 2009-2010: \$21.9 million.

■ Possible cuts: The equivalent of 2.8 full-time teachers. Janitors and maintenance employee cuts have not been determined. The district's successful charter school program has \$200,000 in undisclosed cuts to make.

■ Other cost-saving measures: none.

SOQUEL Union Elementary School District

This small district serves about 1,770 students in elementary and middle school and has left several positions unfilled.

■ Projected budget 2010-2011: \$1 million, about 45 percent of which comes from property taxes.

- Budget 2009-2010: \$1.378 million, but that doesn't count lost local funding and one-time federal funds.

- Possible cuts: The equivalent of 25 full-time employees.

- Other cost-saving measures: Three days furlough for all employees.

Live oak

The Live Oak School District benefits from a parcel tax in 2008 to fund arts, music, library and Life Lab programs.

- Projected budget 2010-2011: \$15 million, about two-thirds of which is state-funded.

- Budget 2009-2010: \$15.35 million.

- Possible cuts: Retirements will likely fill the need to cut the equivalent of seven full-time employees, saving about \$236,000.

- Other cost-saving measures: none.

Pacific Elementary School

This tiny school in Davenport doesn't pay retiree or board member health benefits, and only pays for employee health benefits, not family.

- Projected budget 2010-2011: \$1,049,170, about 10 percent of which is state-funded.

- Budget 2009-2010: \$1,020,450. The district got one-time federal funds.

- Possible cuts: none.

- Other cost-saving measures: none.

HAPPY VALLEYSCHOOL district

This single-school district has an after-school computer program that looks to be cut.

- Projected budget 2010-2011: \$1.3 million, about 75 percent of which is state-funded.

- Budget 2009-2010: \$1.4 million.

- Possible cuts: The equivalent of 5.25 full-time employees, mostly non-teachers.

- Other cost-saving measures: Teachers giving up three professional development days.

Bonny Doon elementary School

The Bonny Doon Community School Foundation has pledged to take over the costs of art and music at this single-school district.

- Projected budget 2010-2011: \$1.379 million, about 25 percent of which is state-funded.

- Budget 2009-2010: \$1.62 million.

■ Possible cuts: Hourly reductions to several staff, including 2.5 hours per week for yard duty staffer, 13.75 hours per week for van driver, 2.5 hours per week for bus driver, seven hours per week for librarian, 2.5 hours per week for a resource specialist and 2.5 hours per week for technician.

■ Other cost-saving measures: none.

Mountain elementary school

This single-school district dropped enrollment to change some of its funding mechanisms and save \$150,000.

■ Projected budget 2010-2011: \$1.08 million, nearly all of which is state-funded. This figure includes funds designated solely for a building project.

■ Budget 2009-2010: \$1.45 million

■ Possible cuts: none.

■ Other cost-saving measures: none.

County office of education

The Office of Education is mostly administrative and provides support to the various school districts. It also administers Regional Occupation Programs, special education and alternative education programs to about 3,700 students.

■ Projected budget 2010-2011: \$48.5 million.

■ Budget 2009-2010: \$51.7 million, which included money rolled in from a previous year.

■ Possible cuts: Three layoffs in special education. Other non-teacher layoffs still not announced.

■ Other cost-saving measures: Staff takes a four-day furlough, teachers and classroom aides take three-day furloughs.



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